

TESTIMONY

SB 370 AN ACT CONCERNING SERVICES PROVIDED BY GENETIC COUNSELORS

Public Health Committee

March 16, 2012

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Welch, Representative Perillo, distinguished members of the Public Health committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today regarding **SB 370 an Act Concerning Services Provided by Genetic Counselors**. My name is Robin C. Schwartz, M.S., C.G.C. I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Genetics and Developmental Biology and Pediatrics. I have a Master's degree in Human Genetics and Genetic Counseling. I have been a board certified genetic counselor since 1982 and am a charter member of the American Board of Genetic Counseling. I provide genetic counseling services to patients with a risk for hereditary or familial cancers. I am also the Associate Director of the genetics residency training programs.

Genetic counselors practice in a variety of settings (for example, in hospitals, universities, laboratories, private offices) and, in brief, see patients who have questions about their family history, genetic test results, genetic conditions in themselves or other family members, or who may be undergoing prenatal testing. We provide information about the genetic disorders our patients are affected with, and also provide supportive counseling, provide families with resources and serve as advocates. The goals of our clinical encounters are that of facilitation of patient decision making by providing information, resources and support, as well as communication of detailed risk information and knowledge of the most up to date available testing options. We also work in administrative and teaching capacities, in medical, dental, nursing and social work schools, hospitals, and in community outreach programs. Our training consists of a Master's Degree from an American Board of Genetic Counseling accredited program, after which we become eligible to sit for a national Board examination to become Certified Genetic Counselors. Continuing education is required for maintaining our certification. It is critical that when a genetic test is ordered that it be ordered for the right reason, for the most appropriate person in the family, and that the results be communicated with care and compassion, and accuracy.

I believe that recognition of the professional status of genetic counselors is very important to help ensure that consumers know when they are being counseled by a genetic counselor and when they are not. As knowledge of the inherited basis of disease continues to grow, and as we look down the street to the promise of personalized medicine, there will be even additional need for professionals trained in the interpretation of complex genetic tests to help guide prevention and treatment of disease.

I am very appreciative of the recognition that the Public Health Committee has given to us as professionals. I have concerns, however, about the proposed language. I do not feel

that I am in a position to be able to support the definition and model of practice as currently defined in the Bill , which as is, could prevent me and my colleagues from practicing as we have been.

Alternatively, however, I would be comfortable and supportive of proceeding with a request to evaluate the scope of our practice, pursuant to Public Act 11 -209 with the goal, ultimately, to have genetic counselors licensed in Connecticut.

I hope we have the chance to discuss this further in the future. Again, I am gratified by your sincere and timely interest in genetic counseling. Thank you for your time.